MIJWAN WELFARE SOCIETY

STRATEGIC PLAN

August 2020

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I.   National Context

India has been witnessing unprecedented macro-economic growth, with the highest GDP growth rate in the world. As our GDP grows, the share of contribution from urban and rural populations is also evolving: in 1990, 43% of our GDP came from urban areas but in 2020 this will increase to over 70%[1]. This is indicative of how our current progress is centred on our cities. As a result, rural India runs the risk of being left behind in India's growth story.

We believe, as Gandhi famously stated, that "the future of India lies in its villages." This statement summarizes his thought that the future of India could only be bright with villages that are self-sufficient, simple, free, non-violent, and truthful[2]. Over the following decades, this idea informed the belief that rural populations are crucial bearers of Indian culture, values and work ethic. 69% of the country's population and 72% of its workforce reside in rural areas, and contribute 40% of the NDP[3]. Despite its decreasing share in the growing economy, rural India has experienced significant development. Poverty in rural India has been falling tremendously over the past few decades and primary education has become increasingly accessible.

Rural India is wonderfully unique in its diversity and includes a multitude of interactions between different languages, cultures, religions, and geographies. While this diversity is the hallmark of our country, and a source of great pride, it also creates unique, interconnected, and complex challenges. One such problem that we face – and arguably our most pressing - is poverty. Over 80% of India's poor live in its villages.[4] This poverty is also unequally distributed; disproportionally affecting social and religious minorities[5]. While national literacy stands at 74%, questions around quality of education are still pervasive as is the issue of retention after the age of 14.

In recent times, 21st century skills[6] have become increasingly important as key tools for availing democratic and economic opportunities, and keeping abreast with changing times. However, formal opportunities for the development of these skills are limited, and are even more so in rural India. For example, less than 10% of the rural population knows how to perform the most basic tasks on a computer or a smart-phone.[7] This may in part be caused by the poor access to electricity and digital infrastructure, but is also closely linked to education. Problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork skills, which form the core of 21st Century Skills, also remain underdeveloped.[8] Our education system does not effectively prepare rural youth for higher education or for the job market, which leads to poor socio-economic outcomes in the log-run. Similarly, while unemployment is officially

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[1] (Capital Market, 2014)
[2] (Thadani, 2011)
[3] (Chand, Srivastava, & Singh, 2017)
[4] (India - Reserve Bank, 2015)
[5] (Jha, 2014)
[6] For more information on 21st Century Skills, See (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016)
[7] (India - National Sample Survey Office, 2014)
[8] (Aaron, 2016)

only 5%, calculations do not account for the lack of job security, regularity, challenges of waged labour, underemployment and growing youth unemployment.[9]

Our patriarchal society has led to women being particularly marginalised. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India - 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women.[10] Drop-out rates are higher for women while their participation in secondary education is significantly lower.[11] Unemployment is higher for women too. However, more significant is the underrepresentation of women in the workforce. Only 25% of the Indian workforce is female, despite women comprising 49% of the national population.[12] Women, especially in rural India, have traditionally had only limited financial and social independence and are severely affected by outdated social-cultural norms and practices. We see the unfortunate results of this marginalisation manifested in the form of high incidences of child marriage, dowry, sexual and physical violence against women, and poor sexual and reproductive health.

Weaker social groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Class[13] and religious minorities also face discrimination. Levels of poverty and unemployment are higher for marginalised groups as compared to the national averages, while education and access to resources are lower.

In an attempt to escape the myriad of challenges, millions of citizens migrate from the villages to the cities, viewing them as beacons of employment and opportunity. In 2011, the total number of rural to urban migrants was 308 million[14] and some estimates report rural-urban migration to be at the rate of 25-30 people per minute.[15] Most, however, end up living in squalid conditions due to high costs of living, physical saturation and limited employment opportunities for unskilled labour. This influx in turn leads to a surge in poverty, with detrimental effects on the quality of life in these urban centres.[16] Migration, therefore, cannot sustainably solve the challenges we face.

We need self-sufficient and equitable rural societies which offer both real and perceived economic opportunities, at par or exceeding those found in urban India. This will lead to more balanced development and a higher quality of life for all. Additionally, India's true potential will only be unlocked when growth and opportunity are equitably available to all her citizens.

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[9] (India - Labour Bureau, 2016) - Volumes 1 and 2
[10] (India - Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011)
[11] (Marwaha, 2017) and (ASER Centre, 2018)
[12] (India - Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011)
[13] As classified by the Government of India
[14] (India - Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011)
[15] (Make in India, n.d.)
[16] (Mitra, 2010)

II. Local Context

We work to tackle these challenges in the village of Mijwan and its surrounding areas. The village is found in the district of Azamgarh, in Uttar Pradesh. It sits about 30 kms away from the city of Azamgarh, 100 kms from Varanasi, and has a population of ~500[17].

Our context and problems mirror those of the rest of rural India. In Uttar Pradesh, a staggering 30% of the rural population earns less than 26 rupees a day, per capita[18]. Further, the State has one of the highest rates of poverty, illiteracy and school dropouts of the country. The district of Azamgarh has a literacy rate of 68% for men and 51% for women, significantly lower than the national average of 82% for men and 65% for women. Interestingly however, the disparity in education in the village of Mijwan is significantly lower – here 68.8% of men and 65% of women are literate.[19]

In Azamgarh women make up 31% of the workforce, slightly higher than the national average; however the 2011 Census indicated that in Mijwan, this is still a challenge – with only 12% of the workforce being female. Uttar Pradesh also has the highest rates of crimes against women in the country[20], in the form of domestic violence[21], dowry-related deaths[22], or other sexual violence[23]. Adding to the situation, there were no candidates from the disadvantaged social classes, and only one female candidate, competing for the 2014 Lok Sabha Election.

III. About Us

The Urdu poet Kaifi Azmi, after suffering from a paralytic stroke which incapacitated his left arm and leg, gave up the comforts of Mumbai to return home to Mijwan - a village frozen in time. He recognised the problems of the village where he was born and grew up. Believing that economic progress can only be meaningful if it reaches out to rural India, he set up the Mijwan Welfare Society (MWS) in 1993.

At the time, the village was isolated from the development of the rest of the country. There were no roads, and limited access to schools and healthcare facilities. The village received electricity for only a few hours a day. Social evils like child marriage were commonplace with girls being married off at as young an age as 12. Kaifi Azmi wanted to see his home become a just, equitable community, which thrived with self-sustaining businesses and strong infrastructure. His efforts saw much development, and today the village has concrete roads, electricity and telephone connections, and boasts both education and training facilities.

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[17] (Uttar Pradesh - Directorate of Census Operations, 2011)
[18] (India - Reserve Bank, 2015)
[19] (Uttar Pradesh - Directorate of Census Operations, 2011)
[20] (Mallapur, 2017)
[21] (Rai, 2017)
[22] (Bhowmick, 2013)
[23] (Mallapur, 2017)

After his unfortunate demise in 2002, his daughter Shabana Azmi and Namrata Goyal carried on his vision of turning the village of Mijwan into an example to be followed across the country.

Today MWS runs the following institutions:

1. Kaifi Azmi Computer Training Centre
2. Kaifi Azmi Kanya Uchatar Madhyamik Vidyalaya - A Higher Secondary School for Girls
3. Kaifi Azmi Sewing and Tailoring Centre for Women

In addition to the aforementioned institutions, the team also supports the village in its dealings with government bodies and to access public utilities and programs. MWS does not aim to provide charity; rather it provides rural citizens with the tools to to help themselves.

MWS hopes to build on the work it has already done, to further develop the village of Mijwan and the District of Azamgarh, and provide an effective example of rural development that can be followed by rural communities across the country. To this end we have created this Strategic Plan to guide our efforts over the next 5 years.

IV.   Strategic Direction

Our Vision

Just, equitable & sustainable communities across rural India

Our Mission

To inspire, equip and empower rural citizens with the tools to catalyse change within their own communities

Our Approach

How?

MWS works towards its mission by building a model for rural development that is both replicable and scalable across the country

Where?

The model will be developed, tested and iterated in the district of Azamgarh, with the central node being the village of Mijwan

Who?

The emphasis is on all rural citizens, including the most marginalised, with a focus on empowering women

Our Inspiration

Our work is rooted in the founding beliefs of Kaifi Azmi, and the ideals and values he embodied. In our work, we try to be true to his vision of empowering rural India.

V.   Programmatic Goals

Goal 1: Ensuring Quality Education

Background

Since the introduction of the Right to Education Act, nearly a decade ago, we have seen promising developments with regard to access to Education. In 2016, the government reported that 99% of Indian villages had a school within a 1km radius[24], and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reported that 95% of children aged 7-16 were enrolled in school[25].

While access has improved, many challenges remain. Uttar Pradesh, whose enrolment numbers are below the national average[26], accounted for over a quarter of the 6 million children out of school in India.[27] Retention too remains a problem and drop-outs jump from 5% at age 14 to 30% by age 18. Drop-out rates are higher still for girls, especially as they grow older.[28] Additionally, approximately 76% of children out of school were from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other religious minorities.[29] A UNICEF study supported this finding, and further added that the disparity was more pronounced in rural communities than in urban communities.[30] There are also fewer schools available for older children - in Uttar Pradesh there are 1,71,403 primary schools but only 27,218 schools at the secondary and upper secondary levels.[31] While some basic infrastructure has improved across the country, other facilities are still lacking – for example while 82% of school had drinking water available, only 55% had useable toilets (51.5% for girls), only 52% had electricity, and less than 3% had computers for children to use.[32]

Most concerning, however, is the lack of quality in education. The 2017 National Achievement Survey (NAS), conducted by the NCERT to measure learning outcomes, found that 8th standard students respond correctly to 53% of questions in Language, 42% in Science and Social Science, and 40% in Mathematics.[33] Similar trends have been reported by ASER, and other organisations.[34] An earlier NAS conducted in 2012 consistently found that while students were competent across subjects in either identifying simple information, solving simple equations, or recalling information, they struggled with complex information, mathematical problems, or questions requiring reasoning.[35]

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[24] (Ansari, 2016)
[25] (ASER Centre, 2016)
[26] (ASER Centre, 2016)
[27] (Ansari, 2016)
[28] (ASER Centre, 2016)
[29] (Ansari, 2016)
[30] (United Nations Children's Fund India, 2014)
[31] (India - National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017) and (India - National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2016)
[32] (ASER Centre, 2016)
[33] (India - National Council of Education Research and Training, 2017)
[34] (India - National Counil of Education Research and Training, 2012)
[35] (India - National Counil of Education Research and Training, 2012)

Quality education is of vital importance – at the most basic level it determines the livelihood an individual can secure. Moreover, its effects have broader ramifications. The 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report states that *"Education has long been recognized as a critical factor in addressing environmental and sustainability issues and ensuring human well-being".*[36] A study which measured data from 114 countries over a 20 year period found that education led to lower economic inequality.[37] Similarly, studies conducted in both developing and developed countries report positive associations between education and health in adults.[38] Education is also recognised to have a strong correlation with multiple forms of civic and social engagement.[39] For example, the aforementioned National Achievement Survey found that only 34% of students in Uttar Pradesh could apply "the knowledge of the Fundamental Rights to find out about their violation, protection and pro-motion in a given situation (sic.)"[40]

Thus, education has a far reaching impact on not just the individual, but the community and the country as a whole. It is imperative that we do not only focus on net enrolment, but provide opportunities for equity and quality in education; going beyond rote learning to provide everyone with thinking skills that develop lifelong learners.

Our Objectives for 2025

All children and adolescents, especially girls, in Mijwan and surrounding communities:

- Access K-12 Education that allows them to think critically, reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, and make conscious decisions
- Are actively engaged in their schools and take ownership of their learning
- Learn at a level that is appropriate for their grade
- Develop their intellectual, emotional, social, physical and creative potential
- Build life and career; learning and innovation; and information, media and technology skills (21st Century Skills)
- Aspire, plan, and implement actions, for future accomplishments and success
- Strive to be socially-responsible, active rural citizens within their communities

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[36] (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) , 2016)
[37] (Patrinos & Psacharopoulos, 2011)
[38] (Vogl, 2012) and (Sridhar, 2008)
[39] (Campbell, 2006)
[40] (India - National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017)

Goal 2: Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods

Background

In 2014, the Rangarajan Report on Poverty estimated that 30% of the country's population lived below the poverty line in the 2011-2012 period.[41][42] A 2013 study reported that poverty levels of minority social and religious groups were disproportionally higher across the country, and even more so in Uttar Pradesh.[43]

Gainful employment serves as the base for individuals to earn, and thus employment generation is a major driver in alleviating poverty. The Fifth Annual Employment-Unemployment Survey reports unemployment to be 5% of the labour force; however unemployment levels are higher for women at 8.7% and even more so for the 18-29 demographic, at 13.2%.[44] The same report also states that it is "*well-known that many of the persons who are reported as 'employed' or 'workers' in official publications do not get work for the entire duration of their stay in the Labour Force*".[45]

Of those employed – almost half are self-employed, while a third are "casual labour", and only 17% have wage/salary jobs. Incomes remain relatively low: 68% of self-employed workers had average monthly earnings up to Rs 7,500; 59% of casual workers had monthly earnings of up to Rs 5,000; and 57% per cent of regular wage/salaried workers had monthly average earnings up to Rs. 10,000. Overall, 46% of the labour force continues to be employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.[46]

The World Bank calculates that India needs to add more than 8 million jobs every year to keep employment rates constant.[47] While estimates vary between government and independent sources, all show that job creation will fall short of this tremendous need. At a time when unemployment is rising and the number of jobs available is on the decline, competition is sure to rise as well. Already non-availability of jobs matching education, skill and experience is the highest rated reason for unemployment amongst graduates and post-graduates.[48] Simultaneously, numerous reports indicate a large portion of Indian graduates are not employable.

Vocational skilling initiatives, which have gained popularity in recent years, seem to have failed to deliver their expected dividends. A recent study indicated that only 18% of the students undergoing vocational education courses get jobs, of which only 7% are in the formal sector.[49] Additionally, and perhaps of greater concern, 31% of youth (15-29) are not in employment, education, or training altogether.[50]

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[41] Based on the revised calculation of a monthly per capita expenditure of Rs. 1407 in urban areas and Rs. 972 in rural areas
[42] (India - Press Information Bureau, 2014)
[43] (Panagariya & More, 2013)
[44] (India - Labour Bureau, 2016)
[45] (India - Labour Bureau, 2016)
[46] Ibid
[47] (World Bank Group, 2018)
[48] (India - Labour Bureau, 2016)
[49] (Pioneer, 2018)
[50] (OECD, 2017)

In addition to the employment-unemployment paradigm, India has one of the lowest percentages of women in the labour force – only about 25%.[51] This is the primary reason for the comparatively low employment rates in India. A World Bank study estimated that reducing the gender gap by 25% could lead to a gain of US$ 1 trillion.[52]

We face a challenging time ahead – the information above suggests an economy that will have to deal with increasing unemployment and competition, while equity and preparedness continue to remain low. While education may prepare future generations, the need of the current generation is not just for jobs that provide income, but rather for sustainable livelihoods – opportunities "*which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation…*"[53]

A World Development Report opined in 2001 that 'to attack poverty requires promoting opportunity, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security'.[54] In our efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods we must provide youth with the support required to access existent opportunities, but also support the creation of new opportunities to meet the challenges of the modern economy. To facilitate empowerment, we need to give them the necessary technical, vocational, and 21st Century skills, as well as exposure to ideas so they can take their own initiative. And finally, for security, we must work towards employment, entrepreneurship, and skill building which keeps in mind market needs, and diversified opportunities, and which can provide a reliable and regular means of livelihood.

Our Objectives for 2025

All rural citizens, especially girls and women, in Mijwan and surrounding communities:

- Attain opportunities for sustained income generation to support the needs of themselves and their families
- Develop the skills necessary to access employment and earnings in the current market and environment
- Access the human, social, physical and financial capital necessary to establish their own ventures or cooperatives
- Explore contemporary ideas and concepts in order to be relevant and competitive in their jobs or ventures

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[51] (India - Labour Bureau, 2016)
[52] (International Labour Organisation, 2017)
[53] (Chambers & Conway, 1992)
[54] (World Bank Group, 2001)

Goal 3: Enabling Meaningful Civic Engagement and Action

Background

Civic engagement refers to citizens working to make a positive difference in the life of their communities, through both political and non-political processes.[55] Civically responsible individuals recognize themselves to be members of larger social units, and therefore believe they have a stake in social problems; such individuals consider how issues affect their localities, make informed decisions and take individual and collective action when appropriate.[56]

At the national level, political participation has always been considered high – the 2014 Lok Sabha elections India had a voter turnout of 66.4%,[57] comparable or higher than the participation in democracies of many "developed" countries[58]. Panchayats – units of self governance at the village, block, and district levels affairs - see even higher electoral turnouts. For example in Gujarat's 2016 local body elections turnout levels reached 80%[59]. However voting is only one small aspect of civic engagement and, even within the political sphere, is only the first step. Communities must remain active in ensuring that elected representatives take responsible decisions for the welfare of citizens.

Panchayats form an important tool through which rural communities can participate in and direct local decision making. However local institutions suffer from the same challenges as the rest of rural India. While legislation ensures numeric equity in the form of women and minority reservation – equity in practice remains a challenge. For example women candidates are elected but decision-making power continues to be held by male family members.[60] We have also seen that while panchayats can be empowering for local development, their performance is often determined by individual capacity and motivation.

Outside the realm of political participation, civic engagement takes on a far broader role. It involves citizens working individually and collectively to better their lives, and that of their community. Vital to this is awareness of one's rights. The National Achievement Survey, discussed in previous sections, found that less than 40% of 8th standard students in Uttar Pradesh could identify the role of Government in providing utilities and infrastructure, apply knowledge of fundamental rights to find out if they have been violated, or describe the role of rural and urban local government bodies.[61]

The other side of the coin is equally important – i.e. the duties of the citizens to take action. This occurs at two levels - individuals must exercise their rights in proactive forms. They must participate and demand what is due to them from government and institutions. However individual and collective responsibility of citizens is also essential to building community resilience: the ability of a community to adapt to changes and challenges while cultivating environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Resilient communities are able

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[55] (Ehrlich, 2000)
[56] Ibid
[57] (India - Election Comission, 2014)
[58] (DeSilve, 2018)
[59] (IANS, 2016)
[60] (Malhotra, 2014)
[61] (India - National Council of Education Research and Training, 2017)

to both sustain and thrive through a myriad of scenarios and challenges. Building community resilience must therefore be a central goal of civic engagement and action.

Although there is no one framework or process to building resilience there are elements that can be identified as essential: ownership must lie with community members; the community must work with the interconnections of different problems and challenges; the process and solutions must change as the challenges are continously changing; where necessary transformation over adaptations must be embraced; and sustainability of the community must be prioritised[62].

The first step towards building resilient communities is awareness and education at all levels. However, we must also provide adequate supports and build the necessary skills that enable citizens to actively shape their community identity, build resilience and hold organisations and institutions responsible and accountable.

Our Objectives for 2025

All rural citizens, especially girls and women:

- Are aware of their rights and responsibilities with regard to: public health and well being, water sanitation and hygiene, gender justice, and public infrastructure and amenities

- Take individual and collective action towards preserving, maintaining and bettering the community

- Support each other to persevere through and recover from times of adversity

- Take the necessary steps to ensure action from governments and businesses

- Actively participate in local government activities, and hold their Gram Panchayat accountable

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[62] (Lerch, 2015)

VI. Organisational Goals

Goal 1: Prioritising Sustainability

Background

Sustainability in the context of Non-Governmental Organisations or Civil Society Organisations has been defined and categorised in numerous ways. For us Sustainability is the ability of an organisation to fulfil its mission over time and, in doing so, meet the needs of its key stakeholders – particularly beneficiaries and supporters.[63]

There are multiple facets which come together to determine sustainability. The first is Strategic Sustainability, which will be addressed by this plan as a whole, as well as future Strategic Plans which will guide our overall direction. Within this Strategic Plan we have chosen to focus on three forms of sustainability:

- *Organisational Sustainability* focuses on the management competencies, employee capabilities and the processes and procedures to effectively deliver services.[64]
- *Program Sustainability* deals with the ability of current and future interventions to have an impact that endures after the targeted intervention has ended. [65]
- *Financial Sustainability* refers to the organisation's ability to diversify sources of funding, access new funds, and adapt to risk related to funding or financial resources.

Ultimately, Sustainability is an ongoing process and not a onetime activity with an achievable end goal. The steps espoused in this 2020-2025 plan represent a prioritisation of sustainability and the first in a series of measures to make the Mijwan Welfare Society sustainable in the long-run.

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[63] (Hailey & Salway, 2018)
[64] Ibid
[65] (Hailey, J., 2014)

MWS will prioritise sustainability in both planning and execution, including in the realms of organisational, programmatic and financial sustainability.

Operational Sustainability

- Stakeholders (governance, management, staff) at all levels of the organisation take ownership of programs and activities

- Stakeholders at all levels of the organisation have the knowledge, capacity and support structures to effectively and independently carry out program activities

Programmatic Sustainability

- Programs are driven by community needs, local context, and current market environment

- Programs focus on long-term impact

- Programs are both evaluated and documented with adequate data to understand success and plan ahead

Financial Sustainability

- Funding and income sources are diversified to reduce risk and over-dependence on individuals

- Forward planning secures the resources necessary to meet long-term goals and objectives

Goal 2: Strengthening Transparency and Accountability

Background

Within the development context, accountability and transparency are two important pillars of Good Governance and are vital to building trust among stakeholders, and demonstrating that an organisation is working efficiently and effectively.[66]

Both concepts go hand in hand - Transparency refers to openness, a lack of secrecy, and an ease of understanding at all levels of the organisations work; it is a vital step to ensure Accountability. [67] Accountability means that the organisation, including the individuals within it, accounts for its activities, accepts responsibility for them, and discloses their results openly. Transparency and Accountability apply to all stakeholders – including the organisation's team, donors, partners, beneficiaries, and the public at large.

While MWS has always maintained all legal and financial compliances, we plan to go a step further and bring accountability and transparency to the forefront; focusing on developing individual and organisational accountability and transparency at all levels.

Our Objectives for 2025

MWS will focus on strengthening both accountability and transparency of the organisation at all levels.

Operational

- Stakeholders (governance, management, staff) at all levels of the organisation have well defined roles and responsibilities

- Stakeholders at all levels of the organisation are held responsible for both their actions and results

- Structures and processes of the organisation enable accurate and timely reporting

Programmatic

- Program outcomes, achievements and challenges are carefully measured, documented and shared with all stakeholders

Financial

- Accounts are transparent and shared openly with all appropriate stakeholders (governance, management, donors, partners)

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[66] (PwC, 2013)
[67] (Institute of Fundraising, n.d.)

Goal 3: Building Strategic Alignment

Background

Strategic Alignment is when the resources and structures of an organisation are in line with its vision, mission, goals and objectives. We believe alignment is important as it allows all stakeholders to work in commonality towards same end goals. This provides stakeholders with a clear direction and allows organisations to focus on doing, rather than deciding what to do.[68]

Our Objectives for 2025

MWS is committed to its vision, mission and approach, and strives to align all areas of the organisation to the same, including:

Operational

- Stakeholders at all levels of the organisation
- Internal processes and practices

Programmatic

- Programs designed, planned and executed by the organisation
- Programmatic partnerships that are developed

Financial

- Expectations of individual donors and corporate funders
- Grants applied for by the organisation

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[68] (Nautin, 2014)

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